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ABSTRACT

The Finnish Foreign Language Diploma for Professional Purposes, which tests English language skills, is described. The examination is intended for both individuals desiring certification of their knowledge and ability to use English in a professional context and for employers wanting independent evaluation for selection purposes. It measures ability at three levels, is accredited by a board representing academic and business interests, was designed by the University of Jyvaskyla (Finland), and is administered jointly by three agencies, including the university. The test consists of a variety of common and job-specific tasks based on language needs identified by a survey of business and industry. The job-specific components are adjusted based on a questionnaire to which the prospective examinee responds and can be further specialized by job description. The examination evaluates both written and oral comprehension and production. It takes 4-5 hours, and includes a half-hour of videotaped oral interviews and presentation. The oral testing team, a national network, is trained in workshops and the videotapes are reviewed for improvement of the testing technique. The candidate registers for the test at least one month before administration, and certificates are issued one month after administration. Evaluation criteria and questionnaires for both examinees and employers are appended. (MSE)

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THE 9th ACROLT LANGUAGE TESTING SYMPOSIUM
Israel, 25-27 April 1990

ED 332518

THE FINNISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DIPLOMA FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

INTRODUCTION

The Finnish Foreign Language Diploma for Professional Purposes (Työelämän Kielidiplomi, TKD) has been established to serve those sectors of working life in Finland which require the ability to communicate in English: national language examinations and certificates will be produced for those working in the fields of industry/technology, business and administration, and the service industries.

The examination is intended for both the individual wishing to have a valid certificate of his/her knowledge of and ability to use English in a professional context and for the employer - actual or would-be - seeking independent evaluation in this key area of competence, for selection purposes.

At present three levels have been envisaged with a broad range of tasks: one indicating the ability to cope with fairly limited vocational language requirements, one indicating ability to cope with a broader range of tasks, and one indicating the ability to cope with a wide range of tasks and situations that require an advanced level of proficiency. The first test for German was organized in March 1991 and followed the format of the English version.

The intiatives leading to the development of the diploma came from Finnish business and industry. These stemmed from a need to remedy a situation in which throughout the country many certificates were being offered to professional groups, often at the end of training courses, resulting in confusion over what any particular one meant in terms of language proficiency.

ACCREDITATION, DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

The diploma is accredited by a board representing the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Training Committee for Industry, the Central Union of Business Employers, the University of Jyväskylä, the Helsinki School of Economics, the University of Technology, the Institute of Marketing and the Finnish Institute for International Trade (Fintra).

The University of Jyväskylä is responsible for the design and development of the examination (ie the necessary research, both practical and theoretical and the validation studies). The University is also responsible for coordinating and training personnel involved with the examination process such as assessors, interlocutors, and technicians.

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The examination is jointly administered by the Institute of Marketing, Fintra and the University of Jyväskylä. This cooperation between government, industry and university is in itself a significant achievement in bringing together experts from widely different backgrounds to find a solution to a problem affecting the country as a whole.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXAMINATION

The framework of the Finnish Foreign Language Diploma for Professional Purposes is based on a thorough examination of communicative language proficiency such as those of Canale & Swain (1980), and Bachman (1990). This provided a framework both for creating the criteria (Appendix 1) used in assessing test performance and the construction of tasks. The test consists of a variety of tasks, some of which are 'common-core' and others which are more job-specific. This enables the examiners to draw conclusions about the candidate's language proficiency in general as well as in situations which are closely related to his/her work.

The common-core tasks are based on the kind of language needs revealed in a series of large-scale surveys of Finnish business and industry and in consultation with expert bodies (Mehtäläinen & Takala: 1990). The tailor-made, or job-specific contents of the examination are made possible by the use of a detailed questionnaire which is completed by the test candidate (Appendix 2) and, where applicable, by the employer (Appendix 3). This ensures that the examination remains flexible, relevant and accountable to the candidate's actual needs. The role of these questionnaires is considered to be a fundamental part of the examination system.

In addition to the fields specified above further subdivisions can also be made on the basis of the candidate's job description so that, for example, managers and secretaries will be expected to perform clearly different language-related tasks: whilst the language needs may be common among these groups, the precise tasks will vary and the focus of examination may be adjusted accordingly.

Although the examination seeks to evaluate language comprehension and production in both its spoken and written forms, these are as fully integrated as one would expect in natural language. Furthermore, the fact that extra-linguistic skills will be an inevitable part of completing the tasks does not invalidate the examination of linguistic proficiency, which remains the major objective of the whole endeavour. So, for example: a salesperson may be asked to give a demonstration of a product or a presentation of a service based on a written and/or oral brief; a secretary may be asked to draft a letter on the basis of prior correspondence and a simulated telephone message; a manager may be asked to defend a certain line of action in a meeting or negotiate the terms of a contract. In each task it is primarily the proficent use of language that is being assessed.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE EXAMINATION

The examination as a whole takes 4 - 5 hours. A total of 2 hours and 15 minutes is allocated to a series of reading comprehension and writing tasks, some of which are integrated. One of the guiding principles behind this part of the examination is that the

test techniques would vary so that the candidate can not prepare for the test by practising certain types of test types, ie multiple-choice.

The reading comprehension section is divided into 3 parts. The candidate starts with a 15 minute skimming/scanning-type of reading task. Then s/he writes a summary (total time 30 - 35 min.) based on an article: the aim is to focus on the main points and their inter-relationships. Candidates also translate 3 - 4 sentences from the text to test more detailed comprehension. The third part (30 minutes) deals with open questions about a text and tests the understanding of the main points (rhetorical or structure-based) in addition to a brief translation exercise.

The writing tasks are usually rather short and specific - reflecting the language needs of the candidate. Examples recently used fall into three types, namely, a letter of complaint (20 minutes), a series of social situations to which the candidate is required to provide an appropriate response, and either writing a letter of response (20 minutes) to someone who would like to visit the candidate's company or translating parts of a text into English (20 minutes). The listening comprehension and speaking tasks are carried out in a language laboratory and concentrate on intensive/extensive listening, simulated telephone conversations, orally answering questions about work and a short presentation about Finland.

The face-to-face oral examination takes about half an hour and is divided into four sections, namely, an interview/discussion which lasts about 10 minutes and deals with topics of general interest such as, education, hobbies, travel. The second part is also an interview (7 minutes) but the candidate is asked to interview the interlocutor about a position which is open at his/her company for a person with an English language teaching background. The third part is a short presentation (7 minutes) which the candidate prepares about the company s/he is presently working for, a product/service or both. The final part is a brief discussion which may be a follow-up to the presentation or on the test as a whole.

The examination is completed with an hour spent on vocabulary and grammar which is passage-based. Through using such a variety of tasks the examination attempts to cover the relevant areas of language proficiency in sufficient depth to be both reliable and valid. To assist in this, some parts of the examination may involve preparation by the candidate prior to taking the test. The candidate may also be given background material (on which some of the test tasks are based) on the spot.

The group which is responsible for developing the test at the University of Jyväskylä is made up of native-speakers of English and Finnish. Qualified experts in the English language, mostly working in LSP in the business and technical fields make up the oral testing team. They are drawn from different parts of Finland so as to develop a network of trained personnel throughout the country.

In terms of assessing candidates' oral performance there is no strict division of labour. The group is of the opinion that, in terms of this type of examination, a combination of English language experts who have either English or Finnish as their mother tongue is likely to be advantageous rather than detrimental to the assessment process. However, in the oral section of the examination a native-speaker of English is always used as the interlocutor, with a native-speaker of English or Finnish as the assessor.

The training of the oral testing team has relied very heavily on workshop-type reviews of prototypes of the test as they have evolved at Jyväskylä. Thus, the group has been able to obtain and to some extent be influenced by grassroots opinion throughout the test's development. This has been particularly evident with respect to the oral section

where substantial review of audio-visual recordings by all involved has been an integral part of team development.

Being able to have the members of the team agree on exactly what it is that differentiates a performance being assigned one value or another has not been straightforward. It remains an essential training objective but the group is of the opinion that a workshop approach to video-recorded interviews does appear to be raising standards of assessor agreement and is a valuable addition to the traditional top-down approach of specifying criteria and explaining what is required in strictly theoretical terms.

As noted above, each oral section of the examination is video-recorded. These recordings are increasingly being subjected to review for the purpose of providing insight into how this section of the test may be further improved. It is our intention that in the near future, students at the University of Jyväskylä who are writing MA theses may be able to use such materials in the course of their empirical work. A certain amount of the funding which the University of Jyväskylä collects for administering the test is to be invested in employing specialists whose specific task it will be to develop the test and, in consequence, further train those who are actively involved with it as assessors.

REGISTRATION, FEES AND CERTIFICATES

The candidate registers for the examination at least one month before it is due to take place. On registration they are sent a needs analysis form (Appendix 4) which is returned at least three weeks prior to the examination. The examination fee for the more advanced certificate is approx. USD 550.

Certificates (Appendix 4) are issued one month after the examination date. The certificate contains a general description of the candidate's language proficiency and a language profile, i.e. a more detailed description of how well s/he can use the language in the various situations s/he is likely to encounter. Such a detailed certificate can also provide guidance for future study. More generally it is hoped that the examination will encourage and stimulate fields of language learning and provide a beneficial 'washback' effect on language teaching and learning in the professional sector.

With regard to future developments it has been decided to start work immediately on the basic and intermediate tests for German as there is a growing need amongst the business and industrial sectors whereas work on the Swedish language test (Swedish being the second national language of Finland) will commence in the first half of 1992.

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ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Oral Test

APPENDIX 1

The Finnish Foreign Language Diploma for Professional Purposes
Työelämän kielidiplomi

Key points and concepts

ANALYTIC CRITERIA

PRONUNCIATION

- pronunciation of individual sounds
- word-stress
- suprasegmental phenomena: intonation, pitch, rhythm

SPEECH FLOW

- unnatural pauses, hesitation
- appropriate rate of speech
- ease vs. struggle

GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY

- systematic vs. random errors
- basic vs. complex structures & errors

VOCABULARY

- precision, adequacy and range

APPROPRIACY

- adjustment of speech to suit situations; use of suitable register in terms of role and participants
- showing awareness of cultural differences
- level of formality
- level of directness (eg forms of address and politeness)

TEXTUAL ORGANIZATION

- clarity of structure
- coherence (of content)
- cohesion markers

DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT

- understanding and reaction; backchannel signals
- turn-taking
- starting, maintaining, and closing discourse

COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

- holistic assessment / outcome/ goal achievement on the basis of all the analytic criteria and the following points:
- dependence on the interlocutor for understanding (clarification, repetition)
- relevance and adequacy of content
- use of strategies to get around difficulties in communication and to enhance performance
- L1 interference
- interactiveness (withdrawn vs. interactive)

APPENDIX 2

THE FINNISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DIPLOMA FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

PERSONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Part 1: For the testee

We aim at designing an examination that will meet your needs, thus it is very important that you answer all the questions as completely as possible. All information you give will remain confidential.

Name: _____ Social security number: _____

Address: _____

_____

Telephone number (for further questions, if necessary):

business: _____ home: _____

1. Your present employer or place of training:

_____

2. If you are not employed now, what kind of employment are you looking for?

_____

3. Your professional title: _____

4. How would you categorize your work?
(Circle appropriate alternatives)

a) Sector:

1 industry
2 trade
3 service
4 other; what? _____

b) Field:

1 administration
2 production
3 maintenance
4 sales/marketing
5 customer service
6 purchases
7 planning
8 training
9 research
10 delivery
11 other; what? ____

c) Position:

1 higher management
2 middle management
3 supervision of work
4 clerical employee
5 other; what? _____

5. What is your basic education? (Please, circle)

1 university degree; what? _____

2 college-level examination; what? _____

3 below college-level vocational training; what? _____

4 other training; what? _____

6. Describe the tasks you do in your work, especially those in which you need English (you can continue on the other side of the page)

_____

_____

_____

7. Your mother tongue:
1 Finnish
2 Swedish
3 other; what? _____

8. What kind of training in English have you had? (Please, circle all relevant points)

1 basic school / junior secondary school
2 senior secondary school
3 vocational school
4 vocational college / institute
5 college / university-level obligatory language studies
6 university degree studies
7 other English studies, what, where, when?

_____

_____

8 studies / work abroad, where, when, how long?

_____

9. Previous language examinations (e.g. TOEFL, Cambridge Proficiency, ELTS, TEEP): which, where, when, results?

_____

_____

_____

10.

A. Please, estimate how often you need English in your work in the following situations. Mark the number describing the frequency of each situation in the box.

0 never
1 a few times a year
2 monthly
3 weekly
4 daily

B. Please, estimate the adequacy of your language proficiency in handling the situations in which you have needed English in your work. Mark the number describing the adequacy in the box.

1 completely inadequate
2 fairly inadequate
3 almost adequate
4 completely adequate

C. Please, estimate how important the situations below are for you in your work now or in the future. Mark the number describing the importance in the box.

1 not at all important
2 not very important
3 important
4 very important

Example: If you need English in customer service weekly, and consider your language proficiency almost adequate for that language use situation, and consider the situation very important for your work, your answer will look like the following:

A	B	C
3	3	4

I. ORAL SITUATIONS	A	B	C
a. customer service, guidance			
b. hosting visitors, social use of language, small talk			
c. interpreting at work			
d. interpreting in social situations, when other things than work are discussed			
e. taking messages, answering inquiries on the telephone			
f. initiating client contacts, conducting demanding discussions on the telephone			
g. visiting fairs / visiting foreign companies			
h. managing a trade fair stand			
i. attending training sessions			
j. customer training / job instructions			
k. negotiations and meetings			
l. restaurant and travelling situations			
m. presenting one's own company / work			
n. other situations, what?			

10.

A. Please, estimate how often you need English in your work in the following situations. Mark the number describing the frequency of each situation in the box.

0 never
1 a few times a year
2 monthly
3 weekly
4 daily

B. Please, estimate the adequacy of your language proficiency in handling the situations in which you have needed English in your work. Mark the number describing the adequacy in the box.

1 completely inadequate
2 fairly inadequate
3 almost adequate
4 completely adequate

C. Please, estimate how important the language use situations are for you in your work now or in the future. Mark the number describing the importance in the box.

1 not at all important
2 not very important
3 important
4 very important

Example: If you read business letters in English every week, consider your language proficiency almost adequate for that purpose, and consider reading them very important for your work, your answer will look like the following:

A	B	C
3	3	4

II. WRITTEN SITUATIONS	A	B	C
a. reading brochures, instructions for use, service and maintenance instructions, shipping documents, etc			
b. reading telegrams, telex and telefax messages and business letters			
c. reading professional journals and professional literature			
d. reading reports, agreements, memoranda, minutes of meetings			
e. translating from English into Finnish			
f. translating from Finnish into English			
g. filling in forms			
h. writing brochures, instructions for use, service and maintenance instructions, transportation documents, etc			
i. writing telegrams, telex and telefax messages and business letters			
j. writing reports, agreements, memoranda and minutes of meetings			
k. situations related to use of computer			
n. other situations, what?			

11. If you translate in your work, what kind of texts do you translate?

12. Other comments and information about your work and the use of English in it:

13. Which countries do those people represent with whom you use English? Please, list in order of frequency of contacts.

14. What role does English play in your career?

15. Please, estimate your mastery of English in the following aspects of language. Mark the number describing your estimate in the box.

1 poor
2 fair
3 satisfactory
4 good
5 very good
6 excellent

ORAL		WRITTEN	
Pronunciation		Spelling	
Grammatical accuracy		Grammatical accuracy	
Vocabulary		Vocabulary	
Appropriate use of language in the situation		Ability to write in the appropriate style	
How well do you think you generally succeed in communication?		How well do you think you generally succeed in communication?	

16. What professional journals and literature in English do you read?

_____

_____

_____

17. What kind of dictionaries do you use in your work?

1 bilingual (e.g. Finnish - English)
2 monolingual (e.g. English - English)
3 special dictionaries; what?

_____

_____

18. Do you know other languages better than English? Which?

_____

19. What are the language use situations in which you would like to be tested? Why? (Please, list a few oral and written situations; you can use the situations listed in question number 10)

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. Preferred place for testing: 1 Helsinki
2 Jyväskylä

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND WELCOME TO THE TEST!

THE FINNISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DIPLOMA FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

PERSONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Part 2: For the employer or employer's representative

We aim at designing an examination that will meet the needs of both the employer and employee, thus it is very important that you answer all the questions as completely as possible. All information you give will remain confidential.

Employer: _____

Field: _____

Address: _____

_____

Contact person: _____ Telephone: _____

Employee's name: _____

1. Employee's job description and position:

_____

_____

_____

2. Does the employee represent the company in situations where English is used?
1 yes 2 no

3.

A. Please, estimate how often the employee needs English in his/her work in the following situations. Mark the number describing the frequency of each situation in the box.

0 never
1 a few times a year
2 monthly
3 weekly
4 daily

B. Please, estimate how important the situations are for the employee's work now or in the future. Mark the number describing the importance in the box.

1 not at all important
2 not very important
3 important
4 very important

C. What is the level of language proficiency needed in the situations? Mark the number corresponding to the level in the box.

1 Poor/elementary
2 Fair
3 Satisfactory
4 Good
5 Very good
6 Excellent

I. ORAL SITUATIONS	A	B	C
a. customer service, guidance			
b. hosting visitors, social use of language, small talk			
c. interpreting at work			
d. interpreting in social situations, when other things than work are discussed			
e. taking messages, answering inquiries on the telephone			
f. initiating client contacts, conducting demanding discussions on the telephone			
g. visiting fairs / visiting foreign companies			
h. managing a trade fair stand			
i. attending training sessions			
j. customer training / job instructions			
k. negotiations and meetings			
l. restaurant and travelling situations			
m. presenting one's own company / work			
n. other situations, what?			

3.

A. Please, estimate how often the employee needs English in his/her work in the following situations. Mark the number describing the frequency of each situation in the box.

0 never
1 a few times a year
2 monthly
3 weekly
4 daily

B. Please, estimate how important the situations are for the employee's work now or in the future. Mark the number describing the importance in the box.

1 not at all important
2 not very important
3 important
4 very important

C. What is the level of language proficiency needed in the situations? Mark the number corresponding to the level in the box.

1 Poor/elementary
2 Fair
3 Satisfactory
4 Good
5 Very good
6 Excellent

II. WRITTEN SITUATIONS	A	B	C
a. reading brochures, instructions for use, service and maintenance instructions, shippin documents, etc			
b. reading telegrams, telex and telefax messages and business letters			
c. reading professional journals and professional literature			
d. reading reports, agreements, memoranda, minutes of meetings			
e. translating from English into Finnish			
f. translating from Finnish into English			
g. filling in forms			
h. writing brochures, instructions for use, service and maintenance instructions, transportation documents, etc			
i. writing telegrams, telex and telefax messages and business letters			
j. writing reports, agreements, memoranda and minutes of meetings			
k. situations related to use of computer			
n. other situations, what?			

4. Other comments and information about the employee's work and use of English in it:

_____

_____

_____

5. English professional journals available at work:

_____

_____

_____

6. Does your company use English in its internal communication? How?

_____

_____

7. Does your company use English for its external communication (with other companies)? How?

_____

_____

8. Do you have databases etc. in English?

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION!

TYOELAMAN KIELI DIPLOMI

APPENDIX 4

THE FINNISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE DIPLOMA FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

Finn Sisu (123456-7890) has taken the test intended for middle management, on December 18, 1989. On the basis of a battery of oral and written tests, his proficiency in English has been assessed as follows:

Overall proficiency 5

* Comprehension of spoken English	5	* Pronunciation	5
* Speaking proficiency	5	* Fluency of speech	5
* Comprehension of written English	5	* Appropriacy	5
* Writing proficiency	4	* Grammar	4
		* Vocabulary	4

A person who has achieved this level of language proficiency has a **very good** knowledge of English. He understands spoken English well and can present what he intends to say clearly and fluently. He is able to use the language actively and to initiate topics. He can read texts that deal with general topics and with his own field without difficulty and understanding everything that is essential. He makes some mistakes, but they do not much impair comprehensibility. The text he writes needs to be checked for language if it is meant for a wider circulation. His vocabulary is fairly large and sufficient for most purposes.

A person who has reached this level of proficiency in English can be expected to be able to represent the company/organization in tasks and situations that require a good command of English.

The test has been prepared and the performance assessed by the University of Jyväskylä and it has been taken at a testing session arranged by the Institute of Marketing.

Jyväskylä, January 25, 1990

Heikki Hirvinen	Sauli Takala	Matti Honni
Chairman of the Diploma Board	University of Jyväskylä	Institute of Marketing